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Workforce and Talent Development Committee
House of Representatives
P.O. Box 30014
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

To the Honorable Members of the House Workforce and Talent Development Committee,

On behalf of the 800 members of the Michigan World Language Association, I am writing to oppose HB 4315 and HB 4316 which would allow students to fulfill the existing Michigan world language graduation requirement with computer science or coding, visual, performing, or applied arts, or career and technical education.

While we support the inclusion of all of these fields of study in the 21st-century curriculum, they are not interchangeable. World languages is the only of these disciplines that allows students to develop the skills necessary to navigate our linguistically and culturally diverse world and workplaces. The recently released report of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences' bipartisan Commission on Languages, [America's Languages: Investing in Language Education for the 21st Century](#), concludes that educating students to be competent in another language is essential to our nation's economic growth, competitiveness, and national defense, and describes how language study also benefits students' overall academic achievement, enhances cognitive ability, and helps students develop the kinds of interpersonal skills they need to succeed both professionally and personally. And according to Michigan State University's Collegiate Employment Research Institute, American companies want workers with global competence - language and cultural skills - alongside STEM and business skills.

Computer science is indeed a critical 21st- century discipline, but it deserves its own graduation requirement separate from the world language requirement. Advocates for computer science education including the non-profit Code.org and tech giants like Google, Amazon, and Microsoft formally oppose classifying computer science as a foreign language in graduation requirements. And computer coding, while a valuable skill, is not the same as learning a language. Most world languages have about 10,000 vocabulary words and grammatical structures, whereas computer languages typically have a vocabulary of about 100 words. Computer coding also cannot also be used to investigate, explain, or reflect on a culture through its language.

The proposed changes would also have the effect of slowing many students' progress towards earning a college degree. Most 4-year colleges and universities here and nationwide have world language requirements, which can be partially or fully met by prior language study. Students who are not required to study languages before college would be at a distinct disadvantage in meeting these requirements and obtaining a degree.

We agree that all of the disciplines described in HB 4316 are indeed 21st-century skills. However, none should take the place of another for Michigan's students. We implore Michigan legislators to vote "no" on any legislation, now or in the future, that equates or seeks to equate learning these skills to learning to a world language.

Sincerely,

Julie A. Foss, Ph.D.
Public Affairs Liaison, Michigan World Language Association

